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Hungary

MEPs ask Hungarian government to change course and fully respect European values

The European Parliament's civil liberties committee today adopted a report by Green MEP Rui Tavares (Portugal) on the situation of fundamental rights in Hungary. The committee approved over 40 recommendations to the Hungarian government and the European Commission that were in the draft report. The Greens/EFA group, in line with their initial position, supported an amendment calling for immediate activation of the process of Article 7 TEU. The final result, supported by the committee, was that the conference of presidents of the European Parliament shall decide on the activation of Article 7 if the recommendations are not satisfactorily implemented.

Commenting after the vote, **Rui Tavares** said:

"Ever since Victor Orban's FIDESZ party obtained a two thirds majority in the Hungarian parliament in 2010, there has been a systemic and general trend of changes to Hungary's constitutional and legal framework that are incompatible with common European values. If these changes are not adequately corrected in time, this systemic trend will lead to a clear risk of a serious breach of the values referred to in Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union - democracy, rule of law, liberty, equality and respect for human rights, including the rights of people belonging to minorities.

There is a long list of areas in which Hungary is at odds with European values: the independence of the data protection authorities, independence of the judiciary, media pluralism, rights of minorities and rights of the political opposition. The recently adopted Fourth Amendment to the Constitution, in particular, is a reason for serious concern as it gravely undermines the role of the Constitutional Court.

The Orban government's actions have seriously weakened the democratic system of checks and balances. The systematic recourse to cardinal laws (which require a two thirds majority to be changed) to regulate questions in Hungary, which in other countries are regulated by laws requiring a simple majority, is also problematic. These laws were clearly intended to set in stone the political views of one party.

With this report, the European Parliament has established a very clear list of recommendations to the Hungarian government to realign itself once more with European principles of democracy and rule of law (1). We are asking the European Commission to establish an Article 2 'Alarm Agenda' whereby a Member

State in which these problems have been identified would have to focus exclusively on issues of democracy and the rule of law in order to obtain cooperation on the many other files for which it is in negotiation with the Commission. The implementation should be monitored by a permanent dialogue, to which Commission, Council and Parliament send representatives.

If Hungary fails to implement the recommendations, Parliament will have to take action, under Article 7(1) of the Treaty, to determine the existence of a clear risk of a serious breach by Hungary of European values.

However, Hungary is not the only country experiencing worrying developments going against European values. We need new instruments to safeguard the respect of European values in all EU countries. Before they can become a member of the EU, candidate countries have to fulfil the Copenhagen criteria. But once the countries have become EU members, there is no mechanism to ensure respect of European values. We therefore propose to establish a "Copenhagen high-level group", which is responsible for monitoring member states' compliance with common European values. The European Union values are admirable - on paper. It is up to us, the citizens, representatives and institutions to ensure that these values are protected and respected".

Note to editors:

(1) The recommendations are set out in paragraph 61 of the Tavares report.

The full text of the draft report at

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-%2f%2fEP%2f%2fNONSGML%2bCOMPARL%2bPE-508.211%2b02%2bDOC%2bPDF%2bV0%2f%2fEN>

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